Making the Most of Ramadhan

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Contents

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Foreword

The holy month of Ramadhan is one of the great blessings of Allah which He has bestowed upon mankind. In this month we were bestowed with the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh). Qur'an was revealed for us in this month – as the book of guidance, the criterion of right and wrong, the light to illuminate our path, a blessing, and a remedy to all problems. In this month, the 'decisive day' of the battle of Badr came so that "he who was to perish should perish through a clear proof, and who was to survive might survive through a clear proof." The 'day of victory' also occurred during this month when without shedding a drop of blood the keys of Makkah were handed over to the Muslims – the city of Makkah that is the centre of gravity of life in the world, the land of House of Allah, the witness of Prophet Ibrahim's (upon him be peace) loyalty and submission to Allah, and the place where Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) mission originated.

The secret of life and glory of Muslim Ummah lies in the struggle for the realisation of the mission of Muhammad (pbuh): the struggle to win hearts, the struggle for civilizational dominance, and, along with this, the struggle against the 'self' for total success and attainment of piety (taqwah) – piety at both individual and collective levels. Piety in personal life is achieved through prayers at night, supplications at dawn and repentance for sins; in public life, it is contained in truthfulness, honesty, trust, justice, bravery, brotherhood and respect for all human rights. Ramadhan shows the path of knowledge and practice for the achievement of all this.

Before the advent of Ramadhan, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to prepare his companions for obtaining maximum benefit from the treasures of this month. In the hope of following in the prophet's footsteps, so that my name is also registered among his followers, a few years ago I had delivered a lecture on welcoming Ramadhan. As is usually happens with me, I gave it the form of a booklet. (It is also available in cassette form).

I have explained in this booklet that the piety that is required to obtain guidance from Qur'an and follow it is achieved through fasting and standing for prayers at night. I have also enumerated ten ways to get maximum benefit from the great month of Ramadhan. I have tried to give some easy-to-follow tips for common man, under each head.

May Allah accept this humble effort of mine, may not take me to task for anything wrong by me, save me from being among those who "profess what they do not practice." I do not aim at winning accolades from my readers, rather my objective is to please Allah, that He may accept my endeavour – for which your practice and prayers in my favour are a great means. If you find this booklet helpful, I request you to pray to Allah that He may end my life in the state of Faith (Iman) and His Mercy may envelop me!

Khurram Murad
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Ramadhan, Qur'an, and Piety

With the advent of the blessed month of Ramadhan, we are going to stand another chance for being showered with its unparalleled blessings and benefits. Due to our limitations and shortcomings, we can neither truly bring into our imagination the heights of its glory, nor can really enumerate all its blessings. With its description by the Prophet (Allah's mercy and peace be upon him) as a 'great month' and a 'blessed month,' we can, however, conceive of the greatness of this month.

Why Ramadhan is so great a month

This month has in its folds one such night that is better than a thousand months – Allah's mercies and blessings that are normally showered in thousands of months are all showered in one night. This is the night in which Our Lord gave us His biggest gift, the Qur'an: "We revealed it (the Clear Book) on a Blessed Night."[1] What is this "Clear Book"? It is a "Mercy from your Lord."[2]

Not just this night, but every day of this month is blessed and every night is blissful. When the day dawns, it gives an opportunity to scores of people to abstain from pleasures and rightful demands of flesh and blood in order to show their obedience to Allah and eagerness to attain His closeness. They stand witness to the fact that Allah alone is their Lord and object of their efforts; that the real thirst in life is the desire to obey and submit to Him; and that getting His pleasure quenches this thirst. When the night envelopes everything in its fold, it provides an opportunity to scores of people to stand in His court, His light, and enrich themselves by reciting from His Book as well as through supplications to Him. Thus, their hearts get illuminated as stars in the sky:

"His light may be likened to a niche wherein is a lamp, and the lamp is in the crystal which shines in star-like brilliance… (Such) people are those whom neither commerce nor striving after profit diverts them from remembering Allah, from establishing prayer, and from paying Zakat."[3]

That every moment of this month is blissful is reflected in value enhancement of all good deeds in it. The value of supplementary acts of worship and good action

[1] Al-Qur'an 34:3
[2] Al-Qur'an 34:6
[3] Al-Qur'an 24:35,37

reaches the value of obligatory deeds, and the value of obligatory deeds increases up to 70 times.[4] The downpour of Allah's blessings and mercy begins with the auspicious arrival of Ramadhan; doors of heaven are opened and taking up the path of goodness becomes easy; doors of hell are closed and fasting becomes a shield against evil, taking up the path of evil becomes difficult; Satan is chained so that his chances of spreading evil become limited.[5]

The Prophet (pbuh) has given glad tidings that a person who observes fasting during the month of Ramadhan will stand purified from all his past sins; similarly, a person who stands in the night for prayers will also be purified of his sins; and a person who seeks the Night of Power during the last decade of Ramadhan with prayers and supplications will also be purified. The only condition is that he should believe in the words and promises of his Lord, Allah Almighty, obey Him in all times and climes with fortitude while always remaining conscious of his own self and the importance of self-accountability.[6]

Your Share

This month is undoubtedly great and blessed, but not everyone who happens to live it is automatically entitled to get the blessings it brings. When it rains, different ponds and pools, canals and rivers receive their share according to their own depth and size. Also, different parts of the land yield crops according to their varied capabilities. The rain is the same for all, but a small pit cannot receive as much of it as can a big pond. Then, the downpour on a rock does not benefit it much; it remains on the surface and flows out from there. But if the downpour is on a fertile land, it enlivens it. The same is true of men, their nature and their destiny.

What is going to be your share from the treasures of Ramadhan? Like the fertile soil, you may become soft-hearted and moist-eyed, sow the seed of belief and determination inside yourself, and add to your capabilities. Thus, a seed will grow into a sapling, and a sapling into a tree. The tree will be laden with the fruits of good deeds, and you will reap the fruit – the fruit of eternal bliss. Just like the farmer, as you sow so shall you reap; and the more you toil, the more you shall get. But if you remain hard-hearted, like the farmer who slept when it was time to wake up and work, then the blessings and goodness of Ramadhan and Tarawih (night prayers during the holy month) will pass without benefiting you, just like the downpour that does not benefit the rock.

Nothing is gained without Allah's Will. But Allah's Will favours only those who strive hard in the way of Allah. Listen to what Allah says. He says that if you walk to Him a foot, He will walk to you two feet; if you move towards Him walking, He will

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[4] Al-Baihaqi, narrated by the Prophet's Companion Salman al-Farisi
[5] Al-Bukhari, narrated by the Prophet's Companion Abu Hurairah
[6] Al-Bukhari and al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah

come to you running.[7] But if you stand still, impervious and oblivious, then Allah's Will cannot be in your favour.

So, be careful lest the whole blessed month of Ramadhan passes, with its downpour of blessings and goodness, and you remain empty-handed.

Make a resolve to get your share of Ramadhan's blessings by keeping in view quite a stern warning of the Holy Prophet:
There are many who observe fast, but they get nothing except hunger and thirst. There are many who pray in the night, but they gain nothing except sleepless nights.[8]

It all depends on you! Get yourself ready to welcome Ramadhan most befittingly, and try to make most of it. Before the advent of Ramadhan, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) used to tell his Companions about its greatness and exhort that they should spare no efforts to get maximum benefit from it. This is what I intend to do here, i.e. discover the secret of the greatness of Ramadhan, understand the importance of preparations and resolve to welcome it, use the opportunity it provides to get optimum benefit, appreciate the points that merit our attention and focus, recommend ways and means that make the journey to the destination easy and more rewarding, and avoid the path and approach that may frustrate the whole purpose and lead to failure and destruction.

The secret of Ramadhan's greatness

First of all, it is essential to know the secret of greatness of the month of Ramadhan. This is because it is impossible to get enriched by it without first knowing the riches it holds. Nor can we be able, without knowing, to achieve single-mindedness, determination and poise to achieve the objective. The secret of the greatness of this month lies in one thing: the revelation of the Qur'an – the revelation started in this month, after its handing over to angel Gabriel from the well-guarded Tablet (Lauh-e-Mahfuz).

In other words, the Merciful and most Benevolent Lord arranged for our guidance in this month. His unsurpassable wisdom illuminated for us the paths for thought and action, and gave us the Standard by which to distinguish between right and wrong. This Standard, the Qur'an, is above all flaws and errors, distortions and manipulations.

This all happened when, one fine morning in the month of Ramadhan, the first ray of God's revelation illumined the heart of Muhammad. So, it is not that Ramadhan is blessed because fasting is observed and Qur'an is recited during this month.

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[7] Al-Muslim, narrated by the Prophet's Companion Abu Dhar
[8] Al-Darimi, narrated by Abu Hurairah

Instead, this month was selected for fasting and recitation of Qur'an because it was this month during which the Holy Book was revealed – a feast that had already made this month great and blessed. This great event required that the days of the month in which it took place be selected for fasting, and its nights for prayers and supplications. This point Allah has elaborated thus:
It was during the month of Ramadhan that Qur'an was sent down as a guidance to the people with Clear Signs of the true guidance and as the Criterion (between right and wrong). So those of you who live to see that month should fast it.[9]

The Gift of Qur'an
Qur'an is a unique and matchless gift of Allah, and greatest among the signs of His mercy. Its revelation is the greatest event in human history, and a manifestation of Allah's mercy with all its exuberance. "He is the Merciful One, who has taught the Qur'an"[10] and "This is a revelation from the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate."[11] For man, Qur'an is the standard for justice and virtue; it is the light and the road to salvation.

Though we are enjoying Allah's innumerable blessings and gifts all the time, the world and everything in it lasts for us just as long as we are able to breathe. The moment we take the last breath, life loses its meaning to us, along with all that goes with it. The thing that can transform these short moments of life into eternal life, and perishable gifts into lasting blessings is Qur'an. That is why it is the most valuable treasure of all the treasures in the world. And that is why the night in which it was revealed has been called the Night of Power and the Blessed Night. Then, whenever Allah makes a mention of its revelation, He connects it with His mercy, wisdom and power. And He ordained Eid celebrations at the end of Ramadhan – as a mark of the anniversary of revelation of the Qur'an:
O Mankind! Now there has come to you an exhortation from your Lord, a healing for the ailments of the hearts, and a guidance and mercy for those who believe. Tell them (O Prophet): 'Let them rejoice in Allah's Grace and Mercy through which this (Book) has come to you. It is better than all the riches that they accumulate.[12]

Days and months are all alike. They all are created by Allah. Yet, there come some moments on which depends the destiny of the whole mankind and the universe. Such was a moment when the ray of Allah's guidance entered the Cave Hera, and Muhammad became its forebearer, trustee and custodian. This great moment came in the month of Ramadhan, and this is the secret of the greatness of this month!

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[9] Al-Qur'an 2:185
[10] Al-Qur'an 55:1-2
[11] Al-Qur'an 41:2
[12] Al-Qur'an 10:57-58

Why Fasting and Prayers in Ramadhan?

Why has every day of the month in which Qur'an was revealed been selected for fasting, and every night for Qur'anic recitation in prayers? Its answer is not difficult, if you understand the nature of the gift of Qur'an and ponder a little on your responsibility as a trustee and custodian of Qur'an.

The Great Trust and Mission

The bigger the gift, the more onerous will be the responsibility of honouring it – as is its due. Since Allah's Book, His Word, is the greatest blessing and sign of His Mercy, it demands a whole range of responsibilities. In order to make life meaningful and consequential, and a success, this Book guides to the right path. For all apparent and hidden, individual and collective ills, this Book offers salvation. For all those groping in the dark, this Book provides the light. Responsibilities of man lie in accepting this Book as such – as the guidance and light to be followed in every sphere of life.

This gift of Allah's guidance brings with its two folds of responsibilities:
First, to follow the path it shows, to proceed in life under its light, to use its prescriptions for curing ills, and to strive to mould our hearts, thought and action, behaviour and character according to the pattern it wants to develop and promote.

Second, to convey its guidance to all others – since it is guidance to all people, not restricted to just one's own self – to invite them on its path, to lit up the dark corners, and to provide the cure to the diseased.

A little thought makes it clear that the second responsibility is but an offshoot, and an inseparable part, of the first one. The former cannot be accomplished without the latter. On the one hand, the very knowledge that Qur'an is "guidance to all the people" entails the responsibility of conveying it to all. Then, it is the right of those who are groping in the dark to be told about the path that leads to light; it is the right of the diseased to get treatment from the healthy, to get cured.

On the other hand, without the effort to take others along the path of Qur'an, one's own taking up, and keeping, the right path will remain risky, flawed and incomplete. This is how one's own destination is lost. The reason is that conveying the message of Qur'an and the struggle to spread its teachings is an essential part of adhering to it – in fact, it marks the epitome of the will to act upon Qur'an. With contacts and relations, your life is so intertwined with the lives of other people that it is quite difficult for you to take up the path of your choosing, unless they too take it up – and keeping on that path is even more difficult.

See, the first revelation to the Prophet consisted of the advice "Read!" And, reading to others is part of reading. The second revelation elaborated this further.

After a short break, it ordained: "Arise, and warn; and magnify the glory of your Lord."[13] It asked to glorify Allah in front of all humanity, and establish His supremacy over them all – so that all surrender to Him, no one should become demigod to rule over others, no one should try to impose one's will or whim on others like him, but all should submit only to their Creator and Lord.

A little attention makes it obvious that this is the purpose of creation, raison d'etre, of the Muslim Ummah. It is a common knowledge that there were individuals at the time of the start of Qur'anic revelation who believed in Oneness of God, in Prophethood and Divine Revelation. There were people who used to pray for the whole night, and those who observed fasting. Allah Almighty has himself spoken highly of their strong contact and relation with Him and their good character. So, why the need for a new Prophet, a new message, and a new Ummah? It was because, first, to remove all spots of darkness accruing from human folly from the right path of belief and action; and, second, to bring into being an Ummah that becomes a witness to all mankind:
And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way, so that you might be witnesses to all mankind.[14]

This is the Qur'anic Mission. And, as the receivers and custodians of Qur'an, it becomes our mission – mine and yours, and of all those who claim to believe in Qur'an.

It is shuddering to think about the burden and enormity of this responsibility. To try to bring the whole of humanity to the right path is a grand task. This is why the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was trembling when he came home after getting the first revelation. Allah Himself has termed the revelation as a "Weighty Word"[15] – upholding and conveying it is a great burden and a big responsibility. It is not easy, but it is not as difficult either as to be beyond human capability. If it were too heavy a burden to be borne by man, Allah the Merciful and Benevolent would not have entrusted him with this responsibility.

The only requirement to be able to carry out this responsibility is to develop such a human being inside our 'self' who is obedient to Allah alone and refuses to share others in his obedience to Him. To create a new man and a new world where Allah's Word reigns supreme and all heads bow down to Him, it is essential to have firm belief in Qur'an, to acquire knowledge that it provides, to keep a strong relationship with it; to have patience and forbearance, rectitude and fortitude; and it is imperative to strive continuously and be prepared for any sacrifice in the way to realise its message. The Qur'anic mission demands very high qualities. It

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[13] Al-Qur'an 74:2-3
[14] Al-Qur'an 2:143
[15] Al-Qur'an 73:5

demands that one's claim to uphold the message of Qur'an must be accompanied by high, and continuously rising, level of thought and character. This, in turn, needs extraordinary resolve and determination, energy and capability.

Qur'an, Fasting and Piety

These high qualities, energy and capability come from piety (Taqwah). Allah made it clear in the very beginning of His Book that "it is a guidance for the pious,"[16] i.e. only those can see the right path, take it and keep it, who have piety. Similarly, the objective of fasting was to make people pious, God-fearing.[17]

Taken together, these two verses of Qur'an tell the secret of the special relationship of fasting and Qur'an, and why the month of the anniversary of Qur'anic revelation was selected for fasting. There could not have been a better time than the blessed moments of this month for developing the quality of piety through fasting – a quality that makes the understanding of Qur'an, and taking up the responsibility, easy and rewarding.

What is piety?

Piety is a very high and invaluable quality, as well as the sum total of all the desirable qualities. In the Qur'an, Allah has given guarantee of success, both here in this world and in the Hereafter, to those who are pious. Piety is what shows the way out of every problem and difficulty. Piety opens up doors for bliss and blessings in ways that are not even imagined. Piety makes all the tasks, mundane and spiritual, easy. It is the pious who have been given the glad tidings of entering paradise; it is they who have been promised forgiveness that paves the way towards paradise. While paradise is their inheritance, they have been given a pledge that worldly riches and peace will also be theirs:

Had the people of those towns believed and been God-fearing, We would certainly have opened up to them blessings from the heavens and the earth.[18]

What is piety? In brief, it is that power and capability of the heart and the mind, consciousness and awareness, determination and resolve, control and discipline, and behaviour and character that enable us to avoid what we deem wrong and harmful to us and to uphold what we deem right and good. The literal meaning of Taqwah (piety) is 'to avoid.' In this light, it is the basic view of Taqwah that I have expounded here.

This capability has been given to us. It is in our nature to avoid damage and harm, to aspire and try for good and benefit. If it were not there, the very existence of man would be impossible, what to talk of his progress. We do not put our hand in

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[16] Al-Qur'an 2:2
[17] Al-Qur'an 2: 183
[18] Al-Qur'an 7:96

the fire; rather, our hand automatically moves away from fire. When our child goes near the fire, we rush to bring the little innocent creature to safety. Why? Simply because we believe that fire burns, it may burn the child's hand or body – and may cause mortal injury. This is 'piety' regarding the fire of this world. We have experience of the harm this fire can cause, i.e. it is in front of our eyes, and so our capability to avoid it is also very strong.

There is another type of fire too. This fire flares up due to decay of belief and action, thought and behaviour. The holy Qur'an forewarns of taking up the paths that lead to falling and burning in the fire. It warns us not to go even near this path to avoid this fire. Denial of truth, disobedience, transgression, falsehood, unlawful earnings, usurpation others' rights and causing harm to them – all lead to fire.

Our eyes cannot see this fire; we have no experience of it. We do not immediately face the consequences of putting our hand in this fire. In contrast, we save ourselves from the fire of this world because we see it and immediately feel its burning. We believe in the harm it can cause us. If we have similar belief that by telling lies our tongue is burning in fire, by eating unlawful food our stomach is filling with embers of fire, and by walking on unlawful path fire is enveloping us, then it will certainly create strength and capability in our hearts, body and mind to avoid these ills.

This piety is about having fear of God and His Fire. The belief in the unseen is the fountain of this piety. The pious who receive guidance from Qur'an are "those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of perception."[19] Today's distortion in belief and misdeeds will be tomorrow's fire. Though we can not see it today, belief in it creates piety. It is this belief that generates the strength and provides the means required to follow the path of Qur'an.

Keeping in view this nature of piety shows that first of all it necessary for us to have a standard and a permanent criterion for determining right and wrong in values, behaviour and character – and then to accept it and abide by it. Piety (taqwah) has no meaning to those who hold that right and wrong do not exist as such, that there is no permanent criterion or standard for distinguishing between right and wrong – these are relative issues that keep changing according to the times and circumstances – that what was right yesterday can be wrong today or what is what is wrong today can be right tomorrow, and that it does not make any difference whether one is honest or not.

We have accepted God as our Lord. It means that true and right is only that which is according to His command, adhering to which pleases Him, and whose knowledge is given by Him. Anything, action or thought, which earns His

[19] Al Qur'an 2:3

displeasure, which invites His wrath, which leads to His disobedience is wrong and evil, harmful and destructive; it is imperative to avoid it.

Accepting God as our Lord also means that there are some realities that we cannot see or experience. These are beyond our sense perception, beyond our body and soul. These are over and above the feelings of hunger and thirst, more valuable and satisfying than the happiness that results from the immediate fulfilment of the desires of body.

This also means that the real knowledge of right and wrong as well as of these realities can be given only by the One who has the knowledge of both the present and the hidden – in fact, it is His Will that sets the standard for right and wrong.

Only those cab be pious believe in these unseen realities. Those who are convinced that there is only one way: to devote their all strength, time and money in the way of Allah. Their talk and walk, their thought and speech all are according to the Will of Allah, devoted to His obedience. Whatever He has given – in terms of strength and wealth, time and resources – is given in His way. The entire life is spent in the concern for meeting Him one day, and in the realisation that success at that moment is the real success.

This is what is meant by piety, as Allah explained in the very beginning of the Qur'an – belief in the unseen, submission to Him alone – as reflected in the form of prayers for the body and in the form of Zakat for the wealth (thinking that what was given by Him is only being spent in His way) – belief in divine revelation for distinguishing between right and wrong, and belief in the life Hereafter.

Those who profess that Allah is their Lord, yet exert themselves – in terms of their strength and energy, time and resources – in ways that earn His displeasure, and do not avoid what invites His wrath, are devoid of piety. Piety is not about ostentatious adherence of rituals, rather it stands for the inner strength and conviction. That is why the Holy Prophet (pbuh), pointing to his heart, once said: "piety lies here."[20]

Piety and Fasting

Keeping in view these meanings of piety, it is not difficult to understand that there could have hardly been any other more effective prescription for creating this quality than fasting, standing in prayers during the night to recite the Qur'an, and that there could not have been more opportune time than Ramadhan to use this prescription. By combining in Ramadhan both fasting and recitation of the Qur'an during prayers, Allah has, in fact, opened up the way for us to attain piety.

[20] Al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah

When we fast, we avoid fulfilling even our legitimate desires, such as hunger and thirst, from dawn to dusk, just for the sake of Allah; we forego our otherwise legitimate urges for His bounty and reward. When night falls, we stand up to hear His Word and go through the entire Qur'an at least once during the month's time. It is unfortunate that due to lack of knowledge of the Arabic language as well as lack of hard work, we understand little – as to what Allah says to us, and what we really hear. Yet, the Divine scheme is quite elaborate: that we should become acquainted with the guidance that Allah has given us in the form of the Qur'an. Acting upon and calling others to it is our foremost duty. Recitation of the Qur'an gives knowledge and strengthens belief while fasting gives boost to the determination of toiling for the sake of Allah.

During Ramadhan, we eat when Allah commands us to eat and we stop eating when Allah so asks. Eating is not forbidden as such, but we consider fulfilling the very basic needs forbidden, as a mark of our obedience to Allah. In normal times, fulfilment of these needs is not just allowed but is an obligation. In this way, we inculcate the quality and strength to stop ourselves from every thing which Allah has asked us to avoid, no matter how intense may be our need or desire, and no matter how good or desirable it may look to us.

Fasting reinforces our belief that the realities about which we have been given information by Allah and His Prophet (pbuh) are not material and sensual but are far more precious, invaluable and satisfying than the material and sensual urges like hunger, thirst, and sex. We do not live on bread only, but high moral values are a must for life. This is how strength is produced inside us to forego and sacrifice pleasures of this world that can be enjoyed here and today for the sake of higher spiritual and moral objectives whose realisation takes time or even demands us to wait till the Hereafter.

Fasting also reinforces the fact that the real thing is obedience to Allah. It is Allah's Will alone that is the final authority to determine right and wrong. Virtue and reward lie neither in eating nor in abstaining from eating; it is neither in sleeping nor in keeping awake. Virtue and reward are contained in submission and obedience to Allah.

When these strengths and sensibilities are produced, we, both individually and collectively at the national level, become able to carry the trust of Qur'an. This is because only then the capability of giving priority to the accomplishment of Qur'anic mission over material and sensual urges can be produced. And this capability is piety (taqwah).

Look at this from another angle. Fast has no physical form: the hunger, thirst and sexual urge can neither be seen by others, nor felt, nor can one fully share in the feelings of others. Then, there is no physical form of sacrificing these urges, either.

So, restraint from fulfilling corporal desires cannot be weighed in material terms. Fasting rests on the firm belief of feeling oneself in the court of Allah. Wherever one may be, He is present – if there are two, He is the third one; if there is someone alone, He is the second one. He is nearer than the jugular vein. It is this belief – the belief of one's own presence in the court of Allah – which is the real result of fasting. That is why it has been told in a Hadith-Qudsi[21]: Fasting is for Me alone, and only I can given the reward for it.[22] Piety is founded on this belief, feeds on this belief, and grows and develops on this belief.

Lastly, yet another important point! When Satan loses all hope of us giving up this prescription that is so beneficial to us, he tries to lessen the benefit – that we become content with taking only a few drops from the sea. Fasting and prayers during the night can produce that high level of piety as we have just talked about, but it can also be limited to producing that kind of piety that is concerned only with minor acts of worship and rituals, which rather reverses the order of priorities: giving priority to tertiary acts over the secondary, and giving priority to the secondary over the primary and obligatory deeds. Similarly, we become content with giving up minor sins!

But, Allah's scheme for inculcating piety through obligatory fasting has much more meaning to it. This piety enables us, as individuals and as a nation, to carry out the mission of Qur'an – in such a way as is due. It is necessary to know this because many keep fasting during the day and remain awake during the night but fail to take even a single step on the path which fasting and recitation of Qur'an want them to take. This is in spite of the fact that the most important of all good acts, the most obligatory of all obligations, and the most beneficial of all benefits, is that we act upon Qur'an and do our best to take others along the path of Qur'an and try practically to do something for this cause.

We can truly realise the importance of this obligation when we have understood the relationship between Qur'an, fasting in the month of Ramadhan and piety.

We should keep this in mind that the month of Ramadhan was selected for fasting only because it was in this month that Qur'an was revealed. The greatness and blessing of this month lie in Allah's decision to send His Guidance in it, and He handed over the last piece of revelation to humanity through His Last Prophet. The purpose of enjoining fasting in this month is to produce that piety in ourselves that generates strength and capability to uphold the Guidance contained in the Book.

[21] In categorisation of Hadith, the Hadith-Qudsi is that Hadith in which Allah's Prophet quotes Allah's statement as such.
[22] Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah

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Things to do

What should you do to get maximum benefit out of Ramadhan? What should you do to inculcate the quality of piety, strength and capability of character through fasting, night prayers, and recitation of Qur'an? Here, I will try to answer these questions.

1. Intention (Niyah) and Resolve (Iradah)

The first thing is sincere intention and firm resolve.

Intention creates awareness and consciousness as well as keeps them alive. If the conscious is awake, it results in resolve, which in turn takes the shape of effort and toil.

True understanding of objective and firm resolve to achieve it is as important for the accomplishment of a task as is spirit for the body. It is in this sense that we have been taught to have 'intention' for prayers, fasting and other acts of worship – so that they are all performed for the sake of Allah. Some scholars hold that without verbal expression of 'intention,' no act of worship is complete; and others assert that determination and decision of the heart is enough, which needs no verbal expression. Yet, it is clear that verbal expression or determination in the heart may fulfil legal criteria, the 'intention' can lead to action only when it has convinced the heart and mind of the importance of the objective and generates the 'resolve' to do everything to achieve the objective.

There is no apparent difference between the dead and living bodies. Yet, the living body is imbued with the capability to move and act, whereas the dead body is devoid of this capability. The same holds true of actions and deeds: if the 'intention' behind an effort is right and good, it will grow and come to fruition. It is this point that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) underscored when he said that the strength and weight of actions depends on 'intention.'[23] Everyone would get only what he intends for.

There has to be 'intention,' right and sincere. In other words, every effort should be aimed at achieving Allah's pleasure and His bounty and reward. If your

[23] Al-Bukhari, narrated by the Prophet's Companion, Second Caliph of Islam, Umar.

'intention' is not sincere, i.e. you do not work solely for Allah's sake, your toil will not be rewarded. It runs the risk of being wasted!

'Intention' is also an expression for readiness and willingness, desire and urge to work. If there is no desire to work, then 'intention' creates the requisite desire. In turn, desire and urge give rise to resolve and determination. No journey can be taken up without determination – even the journey through Ramadhan cannot take you to the destination!

In order to welcome Ramadhan, the first thing you have to do is to renew the feeling and understanding of its high status, its message, its purpose and the blessings it brings in its folds. Then, make 'intention' and 'resolve' that whatever you would do in this month, you would try to inculcate in yourself that high quality of piety that is the objective of fasting, and which can enable you to meet the demands of Deen (not religion, in the strict sense, but a code of life) and to accomplish the mission of Qur'an. Lastly, make a firm decision that devotion and regularity would be the hallmark of all your acts and efforts during the month of Ramadhan – obligatory acts and worship that Allah has enjoined, deeds that Allah's Prophet has emphasised, and the effort that you would do additionally to make full use of the opportunity that Ramadhan holds.

It would be extremely useful if you take out time in solitude, just about two hours, either before the start of Ramadhan or during its very first night. Consider yourself present in the court of Allah, glorify Him and invoke His blessings on the Prophet (pbuh), and repent on your sins and follies. Then, think about all the features of this month (that have been discussed here; or just go through this pamphlet). Finally, make 'intention' and 'resolve' for utmost effort and complete devotion throughout the month, seek Allah's help and guidance, and pray to Him to take you along the path that leads to Him!

2. Your bond with Qur'an

The second most important thing to do is to arrange for recitation and hearing of Qur'an, knowing its meaning and message and developing deeper understanding of it.

The specific acts of worship during the month of Ramadhan, i.e. fasting and prayers at night, are based and connected with Qur'an in one form or another. To listen to the Qur'an, to go through it again and again, to try to understand it, and to develop a yearning to act upon it, are the very purpose of the month of Ramadhan. Therefore, most of your time should be spent in the company of Qur'an. You should spend the time pondering, on the one hand, what Allah says to you, and, on the other, your heart and mind should absorb what Qur'an teaches you. You will, then, automatically be moved to act upon it – you will feel yourself inclined to adhere to Qur'an.

The least that we get from Tarawih (night prayers during Ramadhan) is that we go through the entire Qur'an in one month's time. The spiritual benefit of hearing the Qur'an while standing before Allah is immense, yet, due to lack of understanding in Arabic language, many people fall short of achieving the maximum benefit from this unique scheme of worship – the joy and blessings of knowing, and revising, the message and themes of Qur'an.

This demands that you should pay some extra effort for this purpose. You should devote some time, i.e. additional to which you do for Tarawih, for reading a few passages of Qur'an with the meaning in your own language.

How much in a day, then? One measure is provided by Tarawih itself, i.e. as much as is necessary to finish one reading of the entire Qur'an in one month. Hadith literature provides invaluable insight into this matter too. We come to know that angel Gabriel used to come to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to repeat the entire Qur'an from its beginning to the end during the course of the month.[24] The best plan, therefore, is to study as much part of Qur'an with its meaning in the day time as is going to be read out in prayers during the night (about one juz, i.e. one-thirtieth of the Qur'an). But this would be difficult for all to do.

Qur'an has itself given concession to the weak in this regard – whether their weakness is because of their being sick, or being busy and hard bound to make a living, or being already engaged in struggle in the cause of Allah – by allowing to "recite as much of it as you easily can."[25] So the second best plan, therefore, would be to start studying Qur'an with translation with commitment to continue and finish by the advent of next Ramadhan. This would require just going through the text of just one or two rukoo (about one page, as a rukoo consists of 10-12 lines or 6-10 Qur'anic verses). Taking this much time out is not difficult, either in Ramadhan or other than it.

If you find even this difficult for you, go through just three verses daily. If not in one year, you would be able to go through the Qur'an with quite good understanding in 5-6 years. Starting this project in Ramadhan would inject additional goodness and blessings into it.

In addition to understanding the Qur'an, it is essential to absorb it in your heart and mind and strengthen the bond of your heart and soul with it. The attributes and characteristics, as enunciated by Qur'an itself, of those who listen to and ponder over the meanings of Qur'an are not limited to mere intellectual understanding. Even many non-Muslims develop such understanding, but in spite

[24] Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim, narrated by the Prophet's Companion Abdullah ibn Abbas
[25] Al-Qur'an 73:20

of their appreciation of its message they do not accept it. So, its study involves heart and mind, body and soul – your whole being. Qur'an itself tells that "when Allah's name is mentioned, their hearts quake, and when His verses are recited to them their faith grows."[26] The Prophet has even advised us to weep while studying Qur'an, and if we cannot then we should mimic weeping.

Study you should, though it may be of a small portion of Qur'an. Study surah al-Qariah, which forewarns about the Calamity, or study surah al-Zilzal, which tells that you would face the consequences of even the smallest of your good or evil deeds – but you should be engrossed in it and have a feeling that you are standing before Allah Almighty, that He is talking to you, telling you what you should and what you should not do, informing you about what is going to happen and what you can gain. In brief, your heart and mind, body and soul should all participate in the study of Qur'an.

3. Avoiding disobedience to Allah

The third most important point is to make special efforts to avoid disobedience to Allah.

Fasting aims at inculcating the quality of piety, and the month of Ramadhan is the spring season for the growth of piety. As explained earlier, the Arabic term for piety, i.e. Taqwah, in essence means "to avoid," it is imperative to make special effort in this month to avoid disobedience. This does not mean that we should not try to avoid disobedience in other months, it means that Ramadhan creates a special environment in which it is easier, and hence more urgent, to avoid disobedience in every form. Ramadhan creates this special environment through stopping us from eating throughout the day, keeping us in prayers through most of the night, and making us listen to the Qur'an. So, we should make some special effort to make most of the special environment of Ramadhan.

While we should be conscious and considerate in every sphere of life, relations with other people and social contacts merit special attention. Unfortunate would be the one who observed fasting with great care, prayed day and night, gave alms in the way of Allah, recited Qur'an, yet came to Allah's court on the Day of Judgement burdened with claims of others – because he had beaten one and abused the other, humiliated someone and injured the feelings of some other, denied someone's right and usurped the belongings of some other. His good deeds would be distributed among the claimants. If this would fail meeting the claims of all others, their sins would then be placed in his account. And he would be thrown into the fire.[27]

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[26] Al-Qur'an 8-2
[27] Al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah

Keep in view the context in the Qur'an in which fasting during Ramadhan has been enjoined, you would soon understand the purpose of fasting. First of all, Qur'an talks about the value of human life, along with the provisions of Qisas, then it exhorts upon judicious inheritance will. After this, it takes up the subjects of fasting and Ramadhan. Immediately comes the admonition about usurping one another's possessions by false means. Then, it spells out the principle that virtue and piety do not lie in observance of some rituals, the real piety consists of strong belief, love and commitment, patience and fortitude, and giving generously in the way of Allah. Afterwards, it ordains fighting for the sake of Allah, with the emphasis that He does not like excesses – excess in everything is bad, and this principle has to be taken care of even during the delicate and heated moments of war.

See the order of commandments, coming after one another, and the place of fasting in it. This makes it amply clear that after having observed fasting, it is binding not to commit excesses against others' life, belongings, rights, honour and prestige. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) has summed this up: fasting provides a shield, so do make it a shield. A fasting person should neither use abusive language, nor quarrel; if someone enters into altercation, he should answer it by saying that he is fasting and it is not proper for him to get involved in wrong and indecent acts.[28] In another Hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) said that fasting is not about hunger and thirst, rather it requires giving up falsehood and acting upon it.[29]

It is not just the stomach that fasts; eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet all should fast: Eye should not see, ear should not hear, tongue should not speak, and hands and feet should not do what Allah dislikes and from which He has stopped us.

Control on one's flaws one by one can make a significant difference. For instance, taking a firm decision not to shout or yell at anyone in the coming Ramadhan, or quarrel, or find fault with others – either in their presence or absence – will bring about a great change. In order to avoid disobedience to Allah, we can start by controlling the tongue. Though it may seem difficult, but doing this would save us from wasting our good deeds and, besides, this would also streamline our efforts. Self-critical evaluation regarding these two aspects every night, and seeking Allah's forgiveness in case of some misstep, slip or failure, can be a fruitful exercise.

4. Quest for Goodness

Special quest for goodness and virtues of all kinds is the fourth most important things to do in Ramadhan.

While quest for all types of virtue all the time should be part of a Muslim's nature, yet this quest should acquire special features in the month of Ramadhan – because

[28] Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah
[29] Al-Bukhari, narrated by Abu Hurairah

it is this month in which a small virtue brings the reward of obligatory acts, and obligatory acts' reward increase 70 times, or even more.[30] This is, indeed, a great incentive!

This quest should continue regarding the acts of worship – such as trying to join in congregational prayers with the first call (takbir Tahrima) and regularity in supplementary prayers. But this quest should also be in the field of human relations – it is virtue to meet a Muslim brother smilingly, it is virtue to remove what may cause pain to him, it is virtue to fill his water-skin with water. Hearing about obligatory and supplementary acts of virtue, your attention goes only to prayers. Yet, obligatory and recommended deeds are spread over the entire spectrum of life.

When a person arranges for non-mandatory virtues along with the mandatory ones, obviously he does so on his own volition, since there is no explanation called if he does not observe these virtues. When a person strives quite willingly in the way of Allah, and uses every single and minor opportunity to please his Lord, then, as a Hadith-Qudsi tells, Allah says that He starts loving that person, becomes his ears with which he hears, becomes his eyes with which he sees, becomes his feet on which he stands and walks.[31]

In this vein, you may, for instance, select three things and stick to them fervently during Ramadhan. These are: to offer congregational prayers regularly, not to inflict any harm to others, to meet everyone with a smile.

5. Night Prayers

Standing in prayers for long hours at night comes fifth in our list of priorities.

Standing in prayers at night and recitation of Qur'an, self-accountability and repentance, is an essential and very effective prescription for the achievement of piety. This is the distinctive feature and hallmark of the pious: "They sleep but little by night, and would ask for forgiveness at dawn."[32]

Tarawih prayers during Ramadhan are meant for standing awake at night. Usually people hear Qur'an in Tarawih at the beginning of night. But another time for this begins after the first half or lies in the last one-third of the night. This is the time of dawn – the time that is best for seeking Allah's forgiveness, as Qur'an tells.

With little effort, you can attain the blessings and benefit of standing before Allah at night, and may be counted among "those who implore Allah's forgiveness

[30] Al-Baihaqi, narrated by Salman Al-Farisi
[31] Al-Bukhari, narrated by Abu Hurairah
[32] Al-Qur'an 51:17-18

before daybreak."[33] It is quite easy. You already wake up for suhoor (meals before starting the fast early in the morning). Wake up 20 minutes or half an hour earlier, make ablution, and offer two rakah prayers.

It is this part of the night about which the Holy Prophet (pbuh) has told us that Allah Almighty comes closest to the world and declares, 'Is there anyone who asks Me to fulfil his need, and I will give to him whatever he asks for? Is there anyone who asks for My forgiveness, and I will forgive him?'[34] In another Hadith, there are rather moving words. Allah Almighty spreads out His Hand and says, 'Is there anyone who gives loan to such a Being who is neither poor nor despot?' and He continues saying this till morning.[35]

When Allah has spread out His Hand of Mercy and you are in any case getting out of bed to eat and drink, then nothing can be easier than taking out a few extra minutes to have your sins forgiven and get whatever you ask for.

Still, if it is difficult to pray two rakah, then you can at least place your forehead on the ground before your Lord and plead with Him, weep and wail, seek forgiveness for your sins, request for all that is good along with perseverance in the path of truth. This can easily be done in five to ten minutes. Yet once you have tasted the pleasure of supplications at dawn, you will take out more and more time and will continue even after Ramadhan.

6. 'Zikr' (Remembering Allah) and 'Dua' (supplication)

The sixth important thing to be observed in Ramadhan is Zikr and supplication.

Zikr and supplication should be observed at all times in our life. What is Zikr? Fulfilling any thing that Allah likes – whether it is done through heart or tongue or limbs. In this sense, fasting is Zikr; staying hungry and thirsty for the sake of Allah is Zikr. Recitation of Qur'an, especially in prayers, is a very high form of Zikr. In Ramadhan, mere verbal Zikr, i.e. just repeating some specific words and supplications, is also quite beneficial. It is a supplementary act of virtue but its reward is that of obligatory acts. This keeps us away from slackness and focused on attaining the blessings of Ramadhan.

Glorify Allah in words like *Subhaan Allaah* (Glorified is Allah), *Al-hamdu lillaah* (All praise is for Allah), *La ilaaha illallaah* (There is none worthy of worship but Allah), *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is Greatest), *Subhaan.Allahi wa.bi.hamdihi, Subhaan Allahil-Azeem* (Glorified is Allah and praised is He, Glorified is Allah the Most Great), *Laa hawla wa laa quwwata illa billah* (There is no power and no might except with

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[33] Al-Qur'an 3:17
[34] Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah
[35] Al-Muslim, narrated by Abu Hurairah

Allah), *Astaghfirullaah wa atoobu ilaihi* (I seek forgiveness of Allah and turn to Him in repentance), etc, all the time but especially and more frequently in the blessed month of Ramadhan.

Supplication is a form of Zikr. The foundation of supplication is the belief that Allah alone is the Owner and Master of all treasures of the universe, and everything we want should be sought from His Mercy and bestowal. Supplication is one's admission of being poor and weak. That we should consider ourselves poor and weak in front of Allah alone is the essence of our obedience to Him. Since every moment of Ramadhan is auspicious and opportune, we should keep invoking His mercy and asking for His bounties all the time. In Ramadhan, there are special moments for acceptance of our supplications. Iftar (meals to break the fast in the evening) time is one such moment – in which Allah's mercy is ready to envelop us.

In this pursuit, try to seek Allah's mercy more frequently in the first decade of Ramadhan, His forgiveness in the second decade, and deliverance from hellfire in the third decade. This is how Allah's Prophet (pbuh) has described the special attributes of the decades of the month of Ramadhan.[36]

Memorise a few words of Allah's glorification, and verbalise them day and night regularly. The Prophet (pbuh) has specified certain supplications for different times and circumstances, for the day and the night, along with the universally-relevant ones. Make it a feature of your learning program that you would memorise some from each category every Ramadhan.

7. The Blessed Night and Etikaf

To arrange for search and welcome of the Blessed Night (Lailat-ul Qadr) is the seventh important thing to do in Ramadhan.

It is this night that Qur'an was revealed. This night is better than thousands of months – with regard to its value and greatness, with regard to the task carried out in it, with regard to the bounties and rewards that are distributed, and could be won, in it. A person who stays awake during this night for prayers and supplication has been given the glad tidings of forgiveness from all his sins. Like any other night, there comes a time in this night too when supplications are accepted and whatever is asked for, in terms of goodness in this life and the Hereafter, is granted.[37] Conversely, there can be no bigger misery than remaining devoid of goodness in spite of the descent of this blessed night.[38]

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[36] Al-Baihaqi, narrated by Salman Al-Farisi
[37] Al-Muslim, narrated by the Prophet's Companion Jabir
[38] Ibn-e-Majah, narrated by the Prophet's Companion Anas ibn Malik

While we have not been told which of the Ramadhan nights is the Blessed Night, Hadith informs us that it is any of the odd-numbered nights of the last decade of Ramadhan – any of the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th, and 29th. Other Hadith do not go this further in detail and just say that this night is one of the nights during the last decade or during the whole month of Ramadhan.

It is generally held that 27th night of Ramadhan is that Blessed Night, that it is enough if we stay awake for prayers and supplications in it. While it is true that narration of some Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) and other tall figures of Islam make the 27th night more probable, there appears to be a great wisdom, to me, in not revealing the exact date for the blessed night. If it had been specified as, say, 27th, then this wisdom would be lost.

The secret of keeping it concealed is that you remain engaged in its search, work hard towards its pursuit, and keep the flame of devotion ablaze – search it in the odd-numbered nights during the last decade; if you are more willing and keen in the search, seek it in every night of that decade; if you are simply devoted to the task, go in search for it throughout Ramadhan. What is most pleasing to Allah is that His servant (Abd) should engage himself in untiring effort to please his Lord, to seek His mercy and bounties. More than the work accomplished, it is the 'intention,' resolve and continuous struggle that is required of a true believer. If the night were specified, the very beauty of struggle and effort would be gone.

Staying awake for prayers in this night would get you all the benefits of doing so in any other night, but, more and above that, there will be manifold increase in reward and opening up the floodgates of additional mercy, bounty and generosity. The whole of Ramadhan is a sign of Allah's special favour on this Ummah, in that He has set for us great rewards for less time and effort, which earlier nations could get with great effort spanned over a long time. According to a saying of the Prophet (pbuh), it is as if Muslims get more recompense for their work from Asr (afternoon) to Maghrib (evening), than that which Jews would get for their work from Fajr (dawn) to Zuhr (noon) or Christians' from Zuhr (noon) to Maghrib (evening).[39] The Blessed Night is the biggest of all these signs.

So, get ready! Make a resolve that you would devote at least the five odd-numbered nights of the last decade for the search of the Blessed Night by keeping awake for prayers, supplications, and recitation of Qur'an. If it is not possible to devote the whole night, then do earmark a couple of hours in the last half of the night. Keep standing in prayers and recite from Qur'an as much as you can, prostrate long, be repentant for your sins, weep and wail, and seek forgiveness from Allah.

[39] Al-Bukhari, narrated by ibn Umar

The time of acceptance of supplications comes during every night, but its occurrence during the Blessed Night adds to beauty and power. Since no one is sure about this time, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) taught a very comprehensive Dua to his wife A'isha (may Allah be please with her) for this purpose, and we too should verbalise it through the night: 'Allah.umma innaka afu.wun tuhib.ul afwa fa.fu anni' (O Allah, You are very forgiving and like to forgive, so please forgive me!)

If you have the strength and resolve, then do observe Etikaf (spending the last decade of Ramadhan in a mosque). If it is not possible to do it for 10 days, Etikaf for a shorter period is also alright. Etikaf serves for heart and soul, manner and behaviour, thought and action as an elixir to shape and mould them according to Allah's Will. Thus, it also makes the search for the Blessed Night more easy. Etikaf is not possible for all, yet its importance is evident from the fact that it has been declared Fard-e-Kifayah (an obligation that is fulfilled if someone in the community performs it). The Holy Prophet (pbuh) always observed Etikaf and strongly recommended it. His wife A'isha (RA) tells that with the approach of the last decade of Ramadhan, the Prophet would get prepared for it, keep awake at night himself as well as ask his family members to do the same. He would toil so hard as he would not do in other decades.[40]

The essence of Etikaf is that one should devote himself to Allah by cutting himself away from all the worldly engagements, occupations and interests – leaving home and hearth behind to settle in His house and spend all the time in His remembrance. The end result of Etikaf is to mould the whole life in such a pattern as to give priority and precedence to Allah and obedience to Him over all other things.

If Etikaf of ten days is not possible, what you can do easily is to observe Etikaf for shorter length according to your strength in order not to miss the great reward reserved for this unique act. This can be done by having 'intention' whenever you go to the masjid that whatever time you spend there would be devoted to Allah.

8. Spending in Allah's Way

The eighth important thing to do in Ramadhan is to spend generously in Allah's Way.

Spending in Allah's Way is the greatest act after the obligatory prayers. It consists of spending everything bestowed by Allah, including time and energies of body and soul, but most of all, spending wealth. It is because wealth is the most cherished and liked of the world. And it is the love of the world that is the cause of all weaknesses.

[40] Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim, narrated by Prophet's wife A'isha

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) was the most generous and benevolent of all people. Yet with the advent of Ramadhan and after his meeting with angel Gabriel his generosity and giving nature would know no bounds. In his generosity, he was like the rain-bearing winds.[41] He would also free the prisoners and give alms to anyone who knocked at his door.

Promising 700 times more reward for every grain and coin spend in His way, Allah has said that He could grant even more if He so wills. This promise is there in His Book, whose veracity cannot be doubted in the least. Can there be any other business with the promise of so huge a profit? And can there be any better time for such investment than Ramadhan – when obligatory acts' reward increases 70 times and that of supplementary acts reaches the value of the obligatory deeds?

Spending in Allah's Way is an essential characteristic of true believers. It is the basic condition for piety and inevitable to achieve it. In Ramadhan, the combination of fasting and charitable spending makes your efforts to achieve piety more effective and fruitful. Open up your fist for the establishment and spreading of Allah's message. Give out in Allah's way as much of your wealth as possible for orphans and the destitute. When you are already braving hunger and thirst, you should also bear the burden on your pocket. But whatever you give out, give it solely for the sake of Allah without entertaining any hopes of gratefulness or return from anyone: "We feed you only for Allah's sake; we do not seek of you any recompense or thanks."[42]

It would be a great calamity if you give in charity and make an investment, but waste both the investment and profit by your own hands.

After proper accounting, take out Zakat, too, in this month. This will bring regularity in addition to the 70 times more reward.

9. Service of Humanity

Service of humanity is the ninth item in our list to be given special attention during the month of Ramadhan.

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) has described the month of Ramadhan as the month of brotherhood and fellow-feeling. This month is meant for showing sympathy and grief-sharing with human beings like us, brothers and sisters all. Particularly in economic and financial matters, this month is about sharing the sense of deprivation, worries and problems of others and to help them out. While your hunger and thirst can become a means of producing qualities of piety, control of the self, obedience to God, and patience, it can also give you a taste of what is felt

[41] Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim, narrated by ibn Abbas
[42] Al-Qur'an 76:9

by others during hunger, thirst, grief and pain. Personal experience can generate a strong and sustainable urge for sympathy and help for others.

This area of piety, virtue and goodness is quite vast and has many branches. Feeding the hungry, treatment and visitation of the sick, guarding orphans and widows, meeting the demands of the destitute and oppressed, keeping good relations with relatives – all fall in this vast category. All are entitled to this service – your family and relatives, your brothers in Islam as well as friends, your neighbours as well as people at large.

In order to draw attention towards this extensive task, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) has told us about the great reward for providing iftar meal to a fasting person to break his fast.

The Prophet (pbuh) said: A person who provides iftar to his fasting brother, he will be forgiven from his sins and saved from hellfire. He will get as much reward as of his fasting brother, without any decrease in the reward of the latter. The Prophet's Companions said, "All of us do not have as much means as to provide iftar to the fasting!" The Prophet (pbuh) replied that Allah rewards even the one who offers one sip of milk, one date and one sip of water to the fasting. (He continued) The one who provides meal to the hungry to fully satisfy his hunger, Allah Almighty will satiate him from my fountain, Kauthar, so that he will not feel thirsty till his entry into heaven.[43]

Make sure in this month that you serve your brothers and sisters, feed the hungry, remove the needs of the helpless, give from your wealth the share that is due to the one who asks as well as the one who is destitute but does not beg out of the sense of modesty. Always remember that great gifts and bestowals like forgiveness from sins, freedom from hell, quenching of thirst at fountain of Kauthar, entry into heaven are achieved through service of humanity. Inflicting harm to people wastes heaps of prayers, fasting and charity. It does not matter whether the service is small or big. Whatever you have to give, give it. Do whatever you can. Do not consider anything inferior, however small it may be. One time meal, just one glass of water, or just one rupee, some nice talk, some recommendation, giving water to a thirsty dog, all can lead you to Paradise.

10. Call to the Qur'an

The tenth item in the priority list for Ramadhan is calling towards Qur'an and goodness.

You can understand easily that there can be no better service or sympathy to a person than to save him from Allah's wrath and Fire and bring him to Allah's

[43] Al-Baihaqi, narrated by Salman Al-Farisi

pleasure and His Paradise. The hunger and thirst in this world will end with life here. Here, all sorrows and pains will pass away, but the hunger and thirst in the Hereafter will never go away. No deliverance from sorrow and pain will be possible there. Meal of thorns, drink of blood, pus, and boiling water will become lasting fate. So, if one's services save him from hunger and thirst there and rid him of sorrows and pains, then his services are worth it. Since you get full reward for providing iftar to the fasting, you will similarly be rewarded with the good deeds of those you call to the path of virtue and goodness. If you could realise, this sets the chain of never ending reward.

It is Qur'an because of which Ramadhan has got its status and dignity. What other time could be better than the month of Qur'anic revelation for conveying the message of Qur'an to all people, create awareness in them about the teachings of Qur'an, invite them to the Qur'anic mission, and enable them to rise up to the task of upholding the trust of Qur'an.

You might well be occupied with your personal matters. Your attention is drawn towards self-purification, recitation of Qur'an, supplementary prayers, and earning maximum good deeds for yourself. But this focus should not make you oblivious of this biggest good act, this chain of never ending reward. In return, call to Allah and to Qur'an provide the most effective means of your own purification and training.

In the month of Ramadhan, hearts are generally inclined to doing good. This is why it is more probable that people would listen to you, that their hearts may receive your message well, accept it and devote their lives for this objective, or at least do something towards the end for which Allah sent down His Prophet and Qur'an.

There can be two approaches to do this. First, add to your 'things to do in Ramadhan' plan the duty of calling to Allah, talk on Qur'anic mission and mobilising for serving the cause of Islam. Invite people to Iftar, and take out some time to talk with them. In your interaction with colleagues, keep this duty in mind. Start your talk with reference to Ramadhan and take it to the need of fulfilling the mission of Qur'an.

Second, note down a few names from among the list of your relatives and visitors. Take it upon yourself that with continuous and warm contact with them during the month of Ramadhan, you would prepare them to work for the objective of Qur'an.

3
A Word of Hope

Though I have explained the ten themes separately, a little attention shows that they are all linked with one another because of one common objective and are quite well-coordinated. That objective is to inculcate in us that quality of piety, strength and capability, which enables us to meet the demands of the trust of Qur'an. This objective is the most important objective because our betterment and welfare in individual as well as collective spheres depends on Qur'an. If we can achieve honour and dignity in this world, it is possible only through Qur'an. Our salvation and success in the Hereafter depends on our treatment of Qur'an, the extent to which we follow its prescribed path, and obey the one on whom it was revealed.

Ramadhan comes every year. One comes after another, and has been coming for centuries. Qur'an is the most recited book, its one reading is followed by another and this is an unending endeavour. Every Ramadhan, Qur'an is recited, fasting is observed, prayers are offered and nights are spent in supplications. Yet, we remain where we were before Ramadhan. We remain devoid of piety (taqwah) just as we were without Ramadhan. Neither our personal matters change, nor do our individual manners improve; neither do our national circumstances and conditions change, nor the clouds of slavery and bondage, insult and subjugation hovering over us move away. Why is it so?

First of all, this is because we cannot achieve without deliberate and conscious effort that great amount of good of Ramadhan with which it comes every year. We are either devoid of this conscious effort or simply oblivious of its need and importance.

More than this, our condition is more like the condition of the person about whom the Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: when a person does not stop telling lies and following falsehood, Allah is in no way obliged to accept his hunger and thirst.[44] We declare Allah our Lord, accept Muhammad as our Prophet, believe in Qur'an as the book of Allah, yet we do not try to understand what they all say to us, nor do we obey what they say. If this is not falsehood and acting upon it, then what is?

[44] Al-Bukhari, narrated by Abu Hurairah

Hypocrites would come to the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and state that he was the Prophet of Allah. Allah told him that what they were saying was correct but they were still liars. In other words, a person can be liar even after uttering correct things verbally if he does not meet the demands of what he says.

Moreover, the relationship of our acts of worship, our prayers, our fasting, our deeds and our effort with the mission with which Qur'an came to us has been cut off, and for which the fasting in Ramadhan was enjoined. All this was meant for us to convey the message of Qur'an to all people, mould ourselves the way it wants, along with transforming the society ; establish the writ of Qur'an and continue to struggle in this path with patience and steadfastness, and be ready to offer sacrifices for this purpose.

Every time, Ramadhan comes calling us to know what Allah Almighty says to us in the Qur'an, to give up all that which Allah has forbidden, no matter how much we may cherish and like it.

Else, it may so happen that in spite of finding Ramadhan, you keep fast, brave hunger and thirst, forego sleep at night for Tarawih prayers and yet fail to attain anything save hunger, thirst and sleepless nights. Can there be any bigger misfortune than this? Lest your case be like that of the people of Torah (Jews) about whom Allah said:
The parable of those who were charged with the Torah and then they failed to live up to it is that of a donkey laden with book.[45]

Or, lest Allah's Prophet (pbuh) claim against us regarding Ramadhan and Qur'an in the court of Allah on the Day of Judgement:
And the messenger will say: My Lord! My own people has made this Qur'an an object of laughter.[46]

Allah Almighty may grant us the ability to achieve that quality of piety in the month of Ramadhan which makes us deserving of the guidance of Qur'an. We may acquire the knowledge of Qur'an and act upon it. May Allah give us the courage to uphold the message of Qur'an, and strength, power and enthusiasm to struggle for establishing it! (Ameen)

[45] Al-Qur'an 62:5
[46] Al-Qur'an 25:30

“And be steadfast in prayer; practice regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship).”
(Al-Qur'an, 2:43)

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